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HELPS AND HINDRANCES OF DEAF CHILDREN IN
ACQUIRING SPEECH AND LANGUAGE
AT THE NATURAL AGE.

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The foundation 'hindrance' to the early training in Speech and Language of deaf children, is in the general misconception of their condition. It is practically taken for granted that because they lack one sense they lack many or all the boundless possibilities of hearing children, when in reality they share them. Quite generally and thoughtlessly they are nurtured in an atmosphere which takes it for granted that they are incapable of doing most things, and this environment gradually stifles the very qualities and capabilities the development of which depends on their healthy growth from infancy.

Prominent among these are speech and language. The deaf baby cries and babbles just as the hearing baby, but once let its relatives discover that it is undisturbed by noises and therefore deaf, they stop the endless repetition of language which they address to the hearing baby when it begins to babble, and to which, impelled by its hereditary tendency to talk, its impulse to imitate and its budding power to acquire language, it gradually and naturally responds. The deaf baby has all these impulses and its lack of hearing is compensated by the ability to acquire language and speech through sight if and only if its attention is always and invariably directed to the mouth of the speaker and not distracted by efforts to convey indefinite ideas by the clumsy motions of the hand. It will then become the habit of its life. Even the deaf children of deaf parents and with many deaf relatives have more hearing ancestors who talked than who did not.

Another 'hindrance' to a deaf child's progress is the tendency to spoil him and thus lay the foundation for a future of unhappiness. A wise mother (Mrs. Christine Terhune Herrick) writes, that she "believes in beginning government at

birth because she finds that the rudimentary moral faculties are all there." She asks, "Is it kind, is it fair, to leave him untrained in obedience until life teaches it to him by hard knocks? Can any gift do more for him than the gift of self-control?"

"When he goes to school he is under a master. When he goes into business he is under an employer. When he attains manhood he must comply with the laws of health, the laws of society, or suffer."

We know that the conditions are the same, so far as the rudimentary elements of growth in plants are concerned. All the beginnings of stem and leaf and flower are contained in the tiny seed, but if the seed is not given the required soil, sun, air and water suited to its best development it cannot attain its possibilities.

The best 'helps' to the deaf child acquiring speech and language could be found in its own home and are two-fold. First the child there sees only normal speech to copy and second the chances are that it would be surrounded by more hearing people than deaf people, who should individually take pleasure in showing the deaf child the repetition of language which the hearing child constantly gets through its ears.

The delusion that the deaf child is incapable of responding successfully to these 'helps' is, so far, so general that little is attempted in this way.

There are also many deaf children in the homes of the working people where families have not the opportunity to do, for any of their children, many things that would benefit them.

For these reasons we established the Home for the Training in Speech of Deaf Children before they are of school age in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and for the same reasons these homes should be established everywhere, where there are deaf children needing them. I desire to sound a vigorous note of warning, however, to any one planning for their foundation (and I trust there are many) against permitting any 'hindrances' to creep in and destroy their success.

One vital point is that there should be no interruption, by vacations, of the children's training in speech and language. We had none in our acquiring of them, and their training must have none if it is to be successful.

Another fatal 'hindrance' is carrying ideas to the child's brain by motions or by anything except speech.

An indispensable 'help' is in teaching the speech and language of every-day life in its natural sequences.

The teaching of writing before the child can talk well enough not to be tempted to use writing in place of speech is a 'hindrance.' In our Home we live with the children and take our meals with them which affords constant opportunities for helpful conversation. The children learn, of course, the same plays and games as all children play. We train them to enter schools with hearing children because we think the education of the companionship of hearing children as important in preparing them for life in the hearing world as the school studies. This companionship is equally important later when learning their trades.

Another object in thus segregating them among the hearing for education is to avoid keeping them together through adolescence and adult life which leads so frequently to their marrying each other and propagating deafness.

In attending schools for hearing children the deaf children encounter the same forms of 'helps' and 'hindrances' that confront the hearing children. There are born teachers, mediocre teachers and poor teachers; there are wise parents and unwise parents and many other factors that are either 'helps' or 'hindrances.'

There are also the same differences in ability in the deaf children as in the hearing; among both are found brilliant, mediocre and dull children.

You, dear members of the Congress of Mothers, with the mutually helpful work you are inaugurating among mothers, your Parents' and Teachers' Associations and your varied efforts to aid children, can and do contribute to the diminution of the 'hindrances' and the multiplication of the 'helps.'

You, delegates to the International Congress on the Welfare of the Child, are doubtless doing effective work for the future citizens of your respective countries.

I am sure that we will all agree that anything that we can do to prevent the increase of the number of deaf children is the best 'help' that could possibly be given them.